

Ecumenical Update

Together in Christ, Bound by Love, Serving as One

The electronic ecumenical update for Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT)

Welcome to the electronic ecumenical update for Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT). Here you will find general information on ecumenism so that together we can deepen our understanding of Church Unity. It also includes details of ecumenical activity across our county, as well as what is happening nationally through Churches Together in England (CTE) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). For further help or support around Church Unity please do not hesitate to contact the County Ecumenical Officer.

County Ecumenical Officer Update - Dr Ian Watson



As County Ecumenical Officer (CEO) I act on behalf of NWCT and provide the link with Churches Together in England to support ecumenism across Norfolk and Waveney.

Well, it has been a busy couple of months! I've met loads of wonderful and inspiring Christians, been to several LEPs, local Churches Together Groups and other meetings. It has been great to worship and meet with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Despite the post pandemic challenges all our churches are facing, I have been impressed with the level of commitment to and desire for Church unity across our wonderful county. Clearly, there is much love and shared activity going on between our different traditions.

I will continue to get out and about to meet and support people across Norfolk and Waveney; however, please do not wait for me to contact you. As I mentioned in my last update, we do not have an accurate record of all our LEPs and Local Churches Together Groups, so I may not know who to contact or even if you exist! It would be lovely, therefore, to be invited to any of your regular LEP or local Churches Together meetings.

It is important that we share our experience of ecumenism so that we can learn from others, but also to acknowledge the good work and relationships that sustain Church Unity. Please do get in touch to tell us about your local initiatives, we can then offer our prayers in fellowship and love.

New Website for NWCT

I am pleased to report that we have now updated and refreshed our website for NWCT. In doing so, I thought it important to do it in a way that aligns NWCT better with the wider ecumenical initiatives in Norfolk and Waveney. Accordingly, we are now working in partnership with Network Norfolk, the premier ecumenical Christian news network for our county. Please check it out and the news stories we are starting to put on it. You can also sign up to receive the regular ecumenical updates, or opt out, by emailing: web@networknorwich.co.uk. The website link is: nwct.org.uk

Email: County Ecumenical Officer

Norwich Chain of Prayer

We also held the annual Norwich Chain of Prayer in the Friends (Quakers) Meeting House to start the annual international week of prayer for Christian Unity on 18 January. I have contacted those who participated to ask for feedback and any ideas on how we can develop this wonderful event for future years. It has been running in various formats for over 40 years now, so I am keen to continue and evolve this tradition to meet your wishes.

Dates Agreed for NWCT Church Leaders Meeting

The following dates have been agreed for the Leaders of Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney. If you want to raise any ecumenical-related matter with them, for prayer, discussion or consideration, then please let me know before each meeting.

2024	23 May, White House, Poringland	Church Leaders Meeting & Prayer
	24 November, Anglican Cathedral, Norwich	Church Leaders Meeting and Prayer. Followed by a service of commitment for a refreshed ecumenical mission statement at 3.30pm. Sermon to be given by the General Secretary of Churches Together in England. A reception to meet Church leaders will be held straight after the service.
2025	13-17 January	Church Leaders Pilgrimage to Rome
	23 November, Catholic Cathedral, Norwich	Church Leaders Meeting and Prayer. Followed by an ecumenical service at 3.30pm. A reception to meet Church leaders will be held straight after the service.



Photo from CTE (I'm hidden at the back!) 😊

"Ecumenism is not about structures. It is about fostering and nurturing relationships to build trust and mutual understanding."

Attendance at Ecumenical Training

As a new County Ecumenical Officer, I attended a 2-day induction course run by Churches Together in England (CTE) on 6-7 February at High Leigh. It was a one night residential and there were 31 participants from various denominations from across the country. We were organised into small tutor groups for prayer, discussion and discernment. I found it an uplifting and joyous learning experience.

The biggest takeaway for me from the event, and the thing that resonates most, is a more contemporary view of ecumenism that is slowly emerging. This view or approach does not primarily focus on structures, unnecessary bureaucracy, burdensome paperwork and countless business meetings. We have all experienced the situation where the mere presence of structure and governance, for example, lengthy action plans, comprehensive minutes and organisational constitutions, are seen as ticking the box of ecumenism. Although we sometimes need a little organisation to walk together this should be the minimum necessary. The focus of ecumenism has to be about nurturing and fostering relationships. It is only by developing our relationships that we can build trust and come to a better understanding of our different Christian traditions. What this means in practice is creating opportunities to pray together, worship together, sing together, walk together, learn

and study together, eat (and drink) together, share our challenges and experiences together.

I am heartened that in many places in Norfolk and Waveney this is the approach taken. For example, take the senior Church leaders of NWCT. They do not have a formal constitution nor are they registered as a charity (unlike most other intermediate bodies of CTE); however, they are fully committed over the next two years to worship publicly and pilgrimage together. In Norwich, we have **Transforming Norwich**, where their focus is not on committees or action plans but exclusively on relationships. I could give other examples my point, however, is that it is people, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, that makes the difference not structures. As County Ecumenical Officer, I look forward to encouraging and putting into practice the 'relationship' view of ecumenism as I serve to answer our Lord's Prayer that we should be one.

The Leaders of Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT)

An important aspect of receptive ecumenism is that we learn more about each other's traditions so that we can better appreciate and share our different gifts. After all, ecumenism, at least as understood by most people, is about unity not uniformity. In this issue of the update Liz Hoffbauer, the NWCT Church leader from The Society of Friends, tells us something about why she became a Quaker and why Church Unity is important to their tradition. She gives an interesting insight on what Quakers do. As a Catholic, I went to a Friends meeting for the first time just before Christmas and I found it an uplifting experience. If you have not been before, why not pop along, if my experience is anything to go by you will be warmly welcomed and enjoy the time spent communing with the Holy Spirit.

Why I am a Quaker by Liz Hoffbauer

I was brought up in a devout Anglican family but my godmother, Marjorie Gregory, was a Quaker. I admired her a great deal, as she was kind, funny, generous and forthright, but also very adventurous. When I was in my teens, she decided to leave her nursing job in England (she had trained as an SRN alongside my mother), to go to work in leper colonies in Nigeria. When she was on leave, she would give us slide-shows about the hospitals and the local scenery. While I was at university, the Biafran War started and Auntie Greg was trapped inside Biafra, dealing with hundreds of starving children. Our contact with her had to be via a Swiss Pastor, who worked with the Red Cross. I only found out after her death that she had had to escape from Nigeria, as she had become suspected of being a spy. She was picked up by a light aircraft in a field, where the landing lights were two lines of candles. When she returned home, she was awarded an MBE at Buckingham Palace and worked as a Health Visitor in Oxfordshire.

Photo: Liz being greeted by Bishop Peter (from RCDEA, 2023)



During my university years, I had lost touch with the Church, but I was still very interested in Quakerism. Our daily newspaper was *The Guardian* and, nearly every day, it had a small advert on its front page: “Are you interested in the Quakers?” I sent off for a booklet and was very impressed by some of the details about Meetings for Business. When decisions have to be made about changes, developments or improvements, the Meeting for Business seeks unity. Not unanimity, let it be noted. Some Friends accept that there is a discernment among the Meeting which they do not share, but they are willing to accept that it might be right, and they might be mistaken. There is never a vote, nor a show of hands, but after thoughtful discussion, which should never be a debate, a discernment may be reached, which shows the way forward. A Quaker Meeting or committee meeting of any kind can be long, as each topic is discussed in measured tones and with a careful choice of words. There can be disagreements, but they should never leave anybody feeling belittled or angry about responses. As a result, there are few expressions of disgruntlement afterwards.

When I moved to Norwich as a young wife and mother, I twice visited the Quaker Meeting House before I went to a Meeting for Worship. My first visit was when I was working as a teacher in Norwich Prison and was invited to a talk in the Large Meeting House, given by a Prison Officer, about how to deal with prisoners of different kinds. The second visit was to a much larger meeting of the CND, held in the Small Meeting House. (These are two separate rooms within Norwich Meeting House as a whole.) At a point about twenty minutes into the meeting, a member of the National Front stood up and spoke fluently and consistently without stopping (as he had been trained to do, in order to disrupt the meeting.) The chairwoman couldn’t stop him, so she stood up and shouted: “Coffee time, everyone!” We trooped out for coffee until the police arrived to take him away. After that, I felt I must start to attend actual Quaker Meetings.

I love the shared silence, which is very different from sitting in silence alone at home. Many Quakers enjoy completely silent Meetings for Worship, but I’m always inspired

“I love the shared silence, which is very different from sitting in silence alone at home.”

when somebody stands up to minister, having been moved to do so. The Bible might or not be mentioned but there is an awareness of something in the room which many will call the Holy Spirit. Some call it the still, small voice of calm. Each ministry is different, and each one provides a different reaction; for example, joy, curiosity, sadness, wonder, hope and so on.

As well as the Meetings for Worship, we have monthly discussion meetings on a variety of subjects: the Quaker testimony of Peace, Quakers as Mystics, and Storytelling as Inspiration have been three recent subjects. We also have fortnightly Bible study meetings, which will become weekly during the course of Lent this year.

There is no hierarchy in the Society of Friends (which is another name for Quakers) All work is shared among the members and attenders. This applies to local Meetings, but it also applies to Norfolk and Waveney Area Meeting, which is made up of ten local Meetings: Aylsham, Beccles, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, North Walsham, Norwich, Pakefield, Sheringham, Wells-next-the-Sea and Wymondham. Members from all these Meetings serve, from time to time, on committees at Friends House just opposite Euston Station (it has an excellent and popular café!).

All Quakers try to live according to our testimonies of: Simplicity, Truth, Equality, Peace and Sustainability. This means that we try to live out our faith all day, every day. One of our aims is to “look for that of God in everyone”. Sometimes it is hard to find, but some Friends try to see a troublemaker as he or she was as a child, to understand where he or she is coming from.

I am currently starting my ‘second triennium’ as Church Leader for Norfolk and Waveney Area Meeting. Friends can be appointed to posts for three years, after which they may be re-appointed for three more years. When they have served for six years, they are expected to lay down their service, so that somebody else can be appointed. When I first attended the six-monthly meeting of Church Leaders, I felt very humble. I knew that all the others had worked their way up to their present position. It wouldn't be completely true to say that my name had been drawn out of a hat, but I was certainly invited to take on the role because the Nominations Committee hadn't yet found anyone else.

Being a Church Leader, and also serving with Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT), has been a wonderful experience. It has given me insight into what opportunities are being used to help on a social level, and what threats are being dealt with in every denomination - dwindling and ageing congregations seem to be a common experience. Quakers in Norfolk are active, but our numbers are not large and the friendship and support from other denominations have been enormously valuable. Before COP26, our Sustainability Group decided to hold a pilgrimage from Great Yarmouth to King's Lynn, to take messages to the delegates coming to Glasgow. I was able to let other Church Leaders know, and, spontaneously, it became a joint Quaker/Anglican venture, with supporters from several other denominations. More recently, we have worked together to hold the ‘Connections’ Forum, held in the Weston Room at Norwich Cathedral, which was planned to follow a request from the

Religion Media Centre. It was extremely successful and included other Faith groups too: Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Ba'hais and others, thanks to the support of Interfaith Link in Norfolk.

In this time of a kind of poverty, which most people have never seen before, the activity of NWCT has been invaluable to the Quakers. We have held blanket and toy collections, which have been distributed by the Salvation Army. We at Norwich Meeting House hosted with pride this year's Norwich Chain of Prayer which began the international week of prayer for Christian unity.

If you want to know more about the Quakers, Liz can be contacted via her email: melizhoff@gmail.com

Local Churches Together Groups in Norfolk & Waveney

In January we held the week of prayer for Church Unity. This annual world-wide event has been running for some years. It is a wonderful thing that is now well established across Norfolk and Waveney. Local Churches Together groups continue this hopeful tradition. Here Julia Walton, a Catholic and Chair of Churches Together in Wells-next-the-Sea, North Norfolk, shares her experience of the week. She highlights what they did, what worked well and some of the challenges they face as a local Churches Together group.

Churches Together in Wells by Julia Walton

“Even though there were different opinions on the style and the words of prayer used, what was wonderful is that everyone was prepared to discuss it openly and generously.”

The end of the Prayer for Christian Unity week 2024 is a time to reflect on what we have and how we can build it. I have to say that this has been an amazing week so full of prayer, coffee, tea and biscuits, and empowered by the company of other Christians. Gathering after prayer and worship becomes part of the prayers we offer up in our efforts to be together, and crucially, that we discuss the impact on us from the varied sessions held during the week. Even though there were different opinions on the style and the words of prayer used, what was wonderful is that everyone was prepared to discuss it openly and generously.

Our group in Wells comprises Quakers, Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists (who are all very active) but also Congregationalists and Orthodox. Apart from one day during the week of Prayer for Christian Unity we held a service and prayed together. Interestingly, we couldn't meet on one day as too many of us are involved in preparing and running community lunches! This is not a church led activity but many people from our churches help because it's what they consider they should do. These are committed people – committed to God and to the cause of Christian Unity.

When I reflect on the week, it is a revelation that it is possible to pray in so many different ways. These ranged from the Café Church session organised by the

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Anglicans to the peaceful contemplation style offered by the Quakers. Whichever tradition led on the day it was the devotion to God that I found so heart-warming in today's secular world. The theme this year based on the parable of The Good Samaritan and 'Go do likewise' made for thoughtful discussion. How do you actually step outside your own boundaries without offending the group you belong to? It was challenging but there was a spirit of willingness to do what we should do.

We moved around our churches for daily prayers (we are a small group averaging about 19 at these sessions). The Sunday service for the week was held in the Catholic church with an invited priest (Fr James Walsh – see below) who gave an inspirational talk on ecumenism and its importance for all Christians. We prayed together followed by coffee and tea. Of course, we do this after most services, but it is the annual week of prayer for Christian Unity that offers a wonderful and special opportunity to learn more about our respective traditions, as well as getting to know each other better.

I have been so lucky. I am only in my second year as Chair of Churches Together in Wells. I have to thank all of those involved in our group. I have always been made welcome in whichever church or meeting house I turn up in. In fact, not just a welcome, everyone makes me feel like I've always been there. Although it is a much smaller group than I had experienced in Suffolk it is, nevertheless, clear that the members of Churches Together in Wells have known each other and walked together in Christ for a long time. So, what a pleasure to find that I am so at home with them all. What inspires me is that we continue to encourage each other to pray, study and work together, to continue breaking down the barriers between our different traditions. It is this that motivates and encourages me want to continue to work at it.

In terms of ongoing ecumenical activities, every Wednesday morning the Anglicans and Methodists organise a service called 'Prayer and Praise'. If you are ever in Wells, please pop along as you will receive a warm welcome among a much wider mix than those two churches. We also have a Churches Together choir which has a mix of all churches plus people who tell us they don't usually go to church at all. How wonderful that they so enjoy singing with us that they will come to our services.

You may be wondering if we are watering down what happens in the separate churches, but I don't believe that is the case. Each group of Christians spend a lot of time and effort in supporting their own churches with absolute commitment – it's simply that they are prepared to go the extra mile and do more in the name of God and Unity. I am not, however, saying that we do not have our challenges. I suspect that like many other local ecumenical groups not everyone from all the churches chooses to join in. We have a fairly set group of people who always support and put in the effort to sustain our work on Church Unity. Every now and again someone else decides to give it a try but, to be honest, it is slow (and sometimes hard) work encouraging others to get involved. We must ask ourselves why?

In North Norfolk we have the highest proportion of retired and older people in the country. As we get older it is harder to stay active and keep a busy calendar going. Consequently, we spent some time last year deciding whether we should drop some

items from our calendar. These were difficult decisions to make with not everyone always in agreement. However, what we have in Wells-next-the-Sea is a group of Church Ministers who support and lead with enthusiasm for each other, along with a group of Christians who absolutely believe that we must aim to be one. We don't just 'do' things together – we pray together, we worship together, and we study together, as well as doing what we can to support local charities together. Despite the challenges, we commit to the importance of doing everything possible together.

Our next task is to prepare for Lent and Easter. This year we will have four Lent groups (one more than last year) using Christian Aid materials, Lent lunches on Fridays, Walk of Witness on Good Friday, Dawn Service on Easter Morning. Easter is the most important part of our year, and it must be right that Christians should prepare for it together and then celebrate together. Saying that, I have never been one to do something simply because it is on the calendar, there has to be more to it than that. We must continue to improve how we work together but recognise that moving forward together, whilst respecting our different traditions, is complicated.

“I am inspired to think that is how we continue move on in answering our Lord's Prayer that 'they may be one'. Not full of differences, but full of love and knowing that we could and would cross over the road to help each other.”

I want to end by saying that one of the best services I have ever been to was our All-Souls service. Organised by Anglicans and held in the Catholic Church, you might think they would be the only two groups that would attend, but no, the Methodists and Quakers all came and so did many other people from the town. We remembered those lost locally and we did it together, supporting and loving each other. I am inspired to think that is how we continue to move on in answering our Lord's Prayer 'that they may be one'. Not full of differences, but full of love and knowing that we could and would cross over the road to help each other.

Afterword by Dr Ian Watson County Ecumenical Officer

I have attended two meetings of Churches Together in Wells. I have to say Julia is an excellent and energetic Chair of the group. The love for each other and respect for each other's traditions in the group is palpable and an example to us all. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity I attended their Sunday Ecumenical service in the Catholic church. Fr James Walsh, a retired priest who held several positions throughout East Anglia, was invited to give a talk. I found his call for an ecumenical conversion inspirational and have replicated his short homily here. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Fr James Walsh (Sunday Service Homily in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024)

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be with you this afternoon. They say that an expert is someone who comes with a briefcase from more than 20 miles away! Well, I'm not an expert in ecumenical matters. But like you, I have journeyed along a road that has included Christians from other churches and has been all the richer for it. Today's united service comes from Africa. Burkina Faso, I have to admit, did not figure largely in our geography lessons at school. So, it is good to learn something about this country and its people, as well as the problems they face. Like us the Christian communities there are a minority. Again, like us, they try to bring the light of Christ and the good news of the Gospel to their nation. In some ways our situation here and

“It is not easy to live by Christian moral values in a country that is in moral free-fall. This is why it is so important that we are seen to live genuine Christian lives, that we speak with one voice and give a united witness to our faith. To do this we each need to have experienced an ecumenical conversion. What do I mean by this? It involves a radical change in the way we relate to our fellow Christians. It means moving away from competition to co-operation, from critical disapproval to a creative conversation.”

throughout much of Europe, is more challenging, living as we do in a largely secular society. To live as a Christian is to go against the grain of what is seen as normal. To live by revealed, objective truth runs counter to the subjective viewpoint which sees only your truth and my truth. It is not easy to live by Christian moral values in a country that is in moral free-fall. This is why it is so important that we are seen to live genuine Christian lives, that we speak with one voice and give a united witness to our faith.

To do this we each need to have experienced an ecumenical conversion. What do I mean by this? It involves a radical change in the way we relate to our fellow Christians. It means moving away from competition to co-operation, from critical disapproval to a creative conversation. Rivalry gives way to partnership. From partnership can grow friendships and friendship is a precious gift that we can give to each other. I am sure that for all of us here this has already happened: that I am probably preaching to the converted. If so, praise the Lord!

Each of our churches makes their own special contribution to our ecumenical journey. I think of how the Anglican tradition has enriched my own life. Its willingness to engage with the whole of society, the dignity of its liturgy and music, the theological and scriptural scholarship which has influenced my own ministry, especially writers like C.S. Lewis and C.H. Dodd. I think of the warm devotional Methodist tradition but also its engagement in social justice both home and abroad. John Wesley had an extraordinary gift for making the Christian message accessible to ordinary people. He was supported by his brother Charles who wrote over 2,500 hymns some of which we still use today. We are familiar with ‘Love divine all loves excelling’ and ‘Hark the herald angels sing’ which we use in our Christmas services. I think of the Quaker tradition of Spirit-filled silence and contemplative prayer. How precious this is in a world of noise and bustle. And I think of my own church. What do we bring to the ecumenical table? Well, we are pretty good on guilt! Catholic guilt? On a more serious note, I suppose a sense of history, the place of tradition that is rooted in the scriptures and a respect for the grace of holiness. If we widen the circle I also think of the Eastern Orthodox churches. The churches of East and West are sometimes seen as the two lungs of the universal Church. While it is possible to exist on one lung how much better if the Body of Christ should function with both.

This leads me to my final point. In chapter 17 of John’s Gospel Jesus prays ‘not only for these (his disciples) but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one’. Then follows what I believe is the key phrase: ‘may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me’. Does this not mean that those who believe in Jesus, who is united to his Father in the life of the Trinity, are not also bound together in the same kind of unity? In other words, the Church, the community of believers, should reflect the same kind of oneness that unites Father and Son in the mystery of the Holy Trinity? For some this is an impossible pipe-dream. Yet Jesus speaks of ‘one flock, one shepherd’. We accept Jesus as the one good shepherd. We follow him and listen to his voice. But we have to admit with sadness that we are not truly one flock.

How then do we become one flock and what will this flock look like? For over 50 years our church leaders and theologians have focused on this question. They have identified key aspects that need to be resolved before we can reach full organic unity. These include the place of the Eucharist and the role of authority – how it is exercised and by whom. The road to full unity is open to all and involves both our leaders and ourselves. Our contribution is one that we have already achieved: to pray for and with each other, to love one another and to work together. This is what Pope Francis tells us.

“... let us remember that unity is always better than conflict! And so may He help us to be united to one another by one force, by the power of love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts”

“Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord Jesus, who has made us living members of His body, to keep us deeply united to Him, to help us overcome our conflicts, our divisions, and our self-seeking; and let us remember that unity is always better than conflict! And so may He help us to be united to one another by one force, by the power of love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts. Amen.”

News from Churches Together (CTE) in England



Archbishop Nikitas, CTE’s Orthodox President, has recently been appointed President of the Conference of European Churches

Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain was elected as President of the Conference of European Churches at their 2023 General Assembly. He has been the Orthodox President for Churches Together in England since 2021.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship bringing together 114 churches from Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican traditions from all over Europe for dialogue, advocacy, and joint action. It emerged as a peacebuilding effort in 1959, building bridges between the East and the West during the Cold War.

I replicate here a short interview between CTE’s Senior Communications and Media Manager, Sarah Ball (SB), and Archbishop Nikitas (AN) at a recent CTE event.

The Interview

(SB) Congratulations on your appointment. What does your role being President of the Conference of European Churches involve?

(AN) It is an opportunity to show one Christian unity while we have our different expressions and understandings. It is an honour to be in this leadership position because I’m an Orthodox Christian. But the leadership of CEC is interwoven. With the two Vice Presidents we form a presidency. One comes from the Anglican tradition (Rt Rev Dr Dagmar Winter, Bishop of Huntingdon) and one comes from the Protestant tradition (Rev. Frank Kopania, Protestant Church in Germany). One female. One male. It is the place where the voices can come together, not in cacophony. But we can come together in harmony and as there are various musical instruments in an Orchestra and they produce a beautiful sound.

We're going to hold the tradition that has been entrusted to us, as Paul even reminds Timothy that which is passed on and given to you. But we want to expand and show an openness. To show that we're not afraid to work with others.

(SB) There is a question now, does Europe need religion?

(AN) Of course, Europe needs religion. Europe needs religion like the rest of the world does. First of all, because religion gave law to the world, God brought order from the chaos that existed. And also because religion, Christianity, promotes peace. Not just tolerance. We need to move beyond that. But cooperation, understanding, acceptance of one another. When Christ came to his disciples after the resurrection, he said, 'Peace be with you, I give you my peace' and we want to give that to the world. Not only to Europe but to all the world. Politicians, they may be very good people. They all promise us everything we want to hear however almost none of them fulfil their promises. The church, the Universal Church fulfils its promise.



Photo: Archbishop Nikitas
pictured speaking at the
2023 CEC General
Assembly © Albin
Hillert/CEC

(SB) After decades of relative peace in Europe, it is now on the front line of a war. How is CEC navigating the Ukrainian conflict?

(AN) Well, we hope that through dialogue we can assist in the peace process and hear the voices of all people. The voices of the people in and from Ukraine. We want to hear the voices that come from Russia, Belarus and other places. Let's sit down, let's iron out our differences, let's find the solutions.

Teams from CEC's member churches are not just sitting at a table they are also assisting in financial matters and supporting teams gathering food and provisions that are necessary and helping with psychological and emotional support. And we're working too with non-member churches. The Catholic Church is not a member of CEC but they are our partners in many things. I know of Orthodox Christians who are worshipping in Catholic communities because there no churches for them. Let's open the doors of the church, but also the doors of our hearts.

(SB) For some people in England the word ‘Europe’ has become polarising, especially since the Brexit vote in 2016. Do you think the relationships between English ecumenism and European ecumenism have been damaged?

(AN) Well, I think that we have to look at things realistically. While there may have been Brexit, it doesn’t mean that we took the map and sliced the United Kingdom from Europe. We have to remember that no matter where we are, in Europe, it could be the island of Crete, it could be somewhere in France, but it could also be London. It’s all part of Europe. So we talk about European things, not political things. I don’t think we need to worry about Brexit being good or bad. It’s a reality.

We share so much. You know, I’m a little bit unusual. Because I’m Eastern Orthodox from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. I’m living in London. I came from the United States and I’m ethnically Greek. So I can put all those things together. Why can’t we all bring whatever we have? Not baggage, but our talents, our abilities, our resources, whether we be this side of the English Channel or the other side of the Channel. And bring all of our resources together and weave them into a tapestry to make the world a better and more beautiful place. **[Click here to watch Archbishop Nikitas reflecting on churches’ response to the war in Ukraine and the CEC initiative Pathways to Peace.](#)**

The Silent Peace Walk in London

You may be aware that the Quakers and other faith groups took to the streets of London in a silent walk for peace on Sunday 21st January 2024. With more than 30 ongoing conflicts around the world, particularly in Palestine and Israel, the Ukraine and Sudan, the silent vigil aimed to transcend religious and cultural boundaries. During the walk, faith communities shared their dedication to non-violence, reconciliation and peace, united in the common pursuit of harmonious co-existence. Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and many others joined the walk from Trafalgar Square to Parliament Square and back, weaving a narrative of peace between the city’s key political landmarks.



Both photos by Michael
Preston for Quakers in
Britain

Without flags, placards, slogans or chants, a thousand diverse participants including children carried hand-made white flowers as a reminder that everyone has a role to play in cultivating a more peaceful world. Opening prayers from faith representatives reinforced the diverse yet unified call for peace. The Chair of CTE, Rowena Loverance, reminded the crowd that it was the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. She shared prayers chosen by Christians in Burkina Faso, a country also struggling with military coups and terrorism.

“They have invited us to focus on the story of the Good Samaritan,” she said. “It is a story about crossing boundaries that reminds us of the bonds that unite the whole human family.”

Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer for Quakers in Britain Judith Baker, who was one of the walk co-creators said: “For me, participating in the walk was like being in a gathered Quaker Meeting. I was totally in a state of deep contemplation as we walked. I felt a deep unity both of spirit and of commitment to peace with those of other faiths around me. When we returned to Trafalgar Square the walkers slowly filled the space once more as the faith representatives gathered behind me on the steps. I was to offer the thanks so waited to speak, looking at 1,000 people beaming at me. So many smiling, radiant faces, it was amazing.” She went on to say: “Plum Village and Quakers in Britain, two contemplative traditions, came together for peace and somehow gathered ten different faith representatives to offer prayers for peace, and all walked silently together for peace. On a deeper level, I hope that, like me, most if not all present, found a connection to each other and a recommitment to peace. There has to be another way to solve the conflicts of today, war is not the answer.”



John Cooper, Director of the [Fellowship of Reconciliation](#), a Charity and Network in Association with Churches Together in England said: “There was a real power in the silence that we all experienced. Different faiths, ages and backgrounds all united in a shared wish to break out of a world of violence into a world of peace. One of the most powerful elements of the walk was the deepening of the silence. You could hear everyone drop silent as we filled the road and set off on our walk. The silence deepened as we walked past government offices where decisions over war and peace are made. In the middle of one of the world’s busiest cities, we walked silently for

peace. We may have been fuelled by different faiths, yet our unity of purpose and shared sense of silence sent a strong message. As I walked along I watched time after time as people quietly asked what we were protesting about – ‘**A Walk for Peace**’ would come the reply and, after a pause, the people would smile, nod or give us thumbs up. In an era of noise, war and busyness, our sacred walk was respected and valued by all who encountered it.”

Launch of Single Friendly Church Network

From experience we know that far too often single church goers often feel marginalised. Single Friendly Church Network is a charity with the aim of putting single people back on the agenda for churches. Christian leaders and representatives from many churches and partner organisations gathered to hail the charity launch at St Ethelburga’s in London on 22 November 2023.

Single Friendly Church Network (click here) is on a mission to see single people of all ages thriving in UK churches. Forty percent of adults in UK society are currently single and this is rising in every age group. According to the Network, single people who do attend often feel invisible and isolated. The charity encourages churches of all denominations to complete a ‘Guided Audit’ on how Single Friendly they are – and to work to be more welcoming and inclusive to single people in every aspect of church life. Churches can then be added to a map of Single Friendly Churches across the UK so single people can find a local worshipping community where they are likely to feel most at home.



The General Secretary of Churches Together in England, Bishop Mike Royal, said “Single Friendly Church Network does really valuable work helping churches from any denomination to welcome single people into their congregations. I encourage all our Member Churches to engage with them and access their resources which offer support to make this important culture change.”

[You can watch the launch event video by clicking here.](#)

Two Ecumenical Funds for Young People

There are two new national schemes created by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CBTI) and Churches Together in England (CTE) to fund women and young people in ecumenical experience and study.

The first is called the Pauline Webb Fund. CTBI awards grants to support women's participation in ecumenical work. The programme was established with the support of the late Dr Pauline Webb of the Methodist Church in honour of her leadership in ecumenism, internationally and closer to home. Throughout her career Dr Webb held a series of significant leadership roles in the World Council of Churches and the Methodist Conference of Great Britain. She played a key role in significant ecumenical dialogues and campaigns and in the world of religious affairs broadcasting. She was a powerful advocate for women's rights and leadership through her speeches and publications, but above all through her example. She was keen to support and encourage the participation of women in the ecumenical movement, especially through support for younger leaders to gain ecumenical experience early in their careers.

Photo: Dr Pauline Webb of the Methodist Church, courtesy of the World Council of Churches



The fund awards grants of up to £1000 as a contribution towards travel or other costs to enable women to: attend an ecumenical event; undertake a course or study visit in the area of ecumenism; and conduct research in the area of ecumenism. The fund is open to people who meeting the following criteria: women, normally resident in Britain or Ireland, and members of a church that is in **membership of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**, or one of the **national ecumenical instruments**. (Evidence of support from a sponsoring church or ecumenical body is required as part of the application process.)

In accordance with the focus of this fund, preference is given to women to enable them to have an experience of ecumenical engagement. To apply, simply download the **[application pack here](#)** (Word) and return the completed form by **[email here](#)**. Decisions on the awarding of grants are made by the trustees of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The deadline for the current round of applications is the **30 June 2024**.

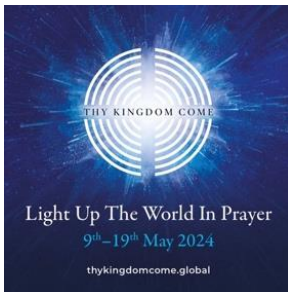


The second is the Bill Snelson Young Ecumenists Fund. This was launched in October 2023 by CTE and the Snelson family. It is in memory of Bill Snelson, a dedicated ecumenist, who was General Secretary of CTE from 1997 to 2008. Grants of up to £6000 from the Fund allow young adults (18 to 35) to experience ecumenism abroad. That experience can be study, pilgrimage, volunteering or any activity that promotes church unity.

The Bill Snelson Young Ecumenists Fund will next open for applications in the week commencing 12th February 2024.

[Download here a brief guide to The Bill Snelson Young Ecumenists Fund and how to apply.](#)

Reminder for Forthcoming Event

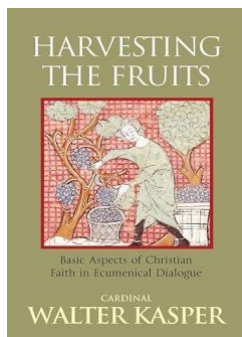


9-19th May 2024 – Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Event

Thy Kingdom Come (TKC) is a global ecumenical prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus. Since it began in May 2016, TKC has grown into a movement which unites more than a million Christians in prayer, in nearly 90% of countries worldwide, across 85 different denominations and traditions. The ultimate purpose is to use prayer so that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith in Jesus Christ. TKC provide a range of resources for churches from prayer stations and '24-7' prayer, to service templates and prayer journals for congregations. They also provide resources to help families and young people pray together including, for example, Family Prayer Adventure Map and the Kingdom Kit. You can find these resources on their website: **[TKC \(click here\)](#)**

St Paul and the Key Elements of Ecumenism - by Dr Ian Watson County Ecumenical Officer NWCT

Recently I have been reading some of the documents that are the fruits of work between the Catholic Church and other traditions on Church unity - some of which I readily admit are a bit heavy going! For the uninitiated like me, however, they are a wonderful repository demonstrating two things. First, how much we actually have in common and agree on. And, secondly, how far we have come in understanding and appreciating those issues of doctrine (or put another way issues of faith and order) where we differ and, in some cases, remain a challenge for further dialogue. At present, the Catholic Church is engaged in international theological dialogue through formal commissions with each of the following Churches and World Communions.



For a slightly different perspective on the goal of ecumenism to Kasper's, you may want to check out the following text published by the Lutheran World Federation: *Facing Unity: Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Church Fellowship* (1985)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Orthodox Church as a whole • The Oriental Orthodox Churches • The Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara • The Syrian Orthodox Church of Malankara • The Assyrian Church of the East • Old Catholic Bishops' Conference Union of Utrecht • The Anglican Communion • Some Pentecostal groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lutheran World Federation • The World Communion of Reformed Churches • The World Methodist Council • The Baptist World Alliance • The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) • The Mennonite World Conference • The World Evangelical Alliance |
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I do not know about you, but I am amazed with the amount of work, effort and dialogue between our traditions. I am surprisingly hopeful and optimistic about the progress made. Some of you may be familiar with Cardinal Walter Kasper's book **Harvesting the Fruits** (2009). For those who want to know more, I highly recommend it as a synthesis of the achievements (and challenges) of forty years of dialogue between Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists. As very much a novice to ecumenism, and a non-theologian, it helped remind me of what I think are the key elements of ecumenism; a question I am sometimes asked when out and about in my role as County Ecumenical Officer.

There are various different ways to answer this question. One way, for example, is what I talked about in the last ecumenical update regarding receptive ecumenism and the difference between Life and Works and Faith and Order. Another is the scriptural understanding although, of course, these are not mutually exclusive, and it is this way I want to turn to.

Currently, in my local 'befriending the scripture' sessions in the Church of the Annunciation in Walsingham, we are reflecting on Acts and St Paul's letters. We are using Tom Wright's wonderful autobiography of Paul as a bridge between them. Surely, this is a good example of receptive ecumenism; that is, Catholics using the Anglican ex-Bishop of Durham's writings to better understand scripture! Beyond quoting John (17:21), it is from Paul that I get the key elements of Church Unity; specifically, from the letter to the Ephesians. So what are they?

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All



One Body: This refers to the belief that all Christians, regardless of time or location, are part of the body of believers and the body of Christ. Just as a body is made up of diverse parts, each with a unique function, the Church is made up of different

members (traditions/ denominations) who contribute to its proper functioning. The Church is greater than the sum of its parts.

One Spirit: The Holy Spirit dwells within every believer, striving to foster unity among them. When believers walk according to the Spirit, they live in harmony with one another. Disunity arises when people follow their own desires instead of the Spirit. The movement for the restoration of communion among all Christians is fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who arouses the desire for unity among Christ's disciples and for those actions which will enable everyone peacefully to re-establish that unity, in the manner desired by Christ.

Come Holy Spirit!

Giver of life - Sustain your creation!

Spirit of truth - Set us free!

Spirit of unity - Reconcile your people!

Holy Spirit- Transform and sanctify us!



One Hope and One Lord: The hope of every Christian is Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven. Unlike uncertain hopes, our hope in Jesus is certain. This hope unifies believers, and as our Lord, Jesus Christ is the Master of all believers and since all believers have the same Lord, His commands should not lead to disagreement or disunity. Disunity occurs when believers disobey Jesus, who said "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth." (John 14:15-17).

The work of reconciliation must begin with God's people saying because we are one, we will not be divided.

One Faith: Through their faith in Jesus, Christians believe they have received salvation, forgiveness, redemption, grace, peace, new life, guidance, and hope. This common faith should eliminate the grounds for boasting about our own tradition as the only correct one. Instead, we should recognise the truth in all traditions which comes from our common faith. This is why in receptive ecumenism we focus on being a good and true Christian within our own tradition, along with the exchange of gifts that recognise the truth and beauty that exist in other church traditions.

One Baptism: This refers to the baptism in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism creates unity among believers and is connected to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Although some Christians do not practice the sacrament of Baptism it is, nevertheless, a key element of unity among Christians because it represents obedience to Christ, identification with Him, forgiveness of sins, incorporation into the body of Christ, and a shared experience that unites believers.

One God and Father of All: God is the Father of all believers, regardless of their background. He is above all in control of all things, present with all believers, and cares for them as a loving Father. Recognising God as the common Father fosters unity among believers.

By focusing on these elements, we create the common ground to practice visible unity in Christ. We should not, however, underestimate those areas of difference that remain in doctrine - as the work of the various long-standing commissions listed earlier testify. Maybe these differences will be reconciled in time, or maybe we will continue to disagree with other Christians about elements of their theology, or how they worship, or what kind of behaviours they think are okay to participate in. Well, at least from my perspective, although it is important that we continue to talk with our brothers and sisters in Christ over these disagreements, we can still get along in peace and in hope if we all remain focused on the elements of unity that St Paul lays out for us in his exhortation:

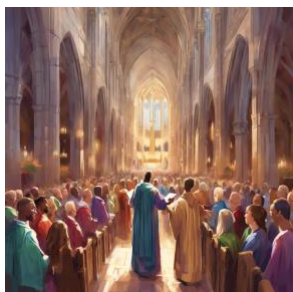
I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-6)

Beyond scripture and St Paul, another way I try to answer the question about what the key elements of Church Unity for Christians are, I give the following answer:

1. **Faith in Jesus Christ:** as Christians we all believe in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, which forms the foundation of our unity.
2. **Scripture:** we consider the Bible as our authoritative source of truth and guidance, which helps to unify us in our beliefs and practices. (Although some of us think tradition is also authoritative, and some take a more literal interpretation of scripture than others.)
3. **Prayer:** As Christians we all worship God. We express our love and devotion through prayer, singing, and other acts of worship. We pray for each other and, increasingly, we pray and worship together across our traditions, which we do on a regular basis; for example, in the annual international week of prayer for Christian Unity.
4. **Sacraments:** As Christians we share in certain sacraments, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, which symbolise our faith and serve as a means of grace. Certain traditions, however, have other sacraments and we express different views about their importance. This reflects the diversity in Christ's Bride - the Church. Ecumenism is about unity not uniformity. Christ is declared the Head of the Church. As individual believers within the Church we have an intimate relationship with Christ that is closer than any earthly relationship.
5. **Love and Fellowship:** Christians are called by Jesus to love one another and live in fellowship with each other, supporting and encouraging one another in their faith.

Christ Jesus prayed for the unity of all Believers when He said “that all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21).

6. Mission and Evangelism: As Christians we are united in our mission to share the message of salvation and make disciples of all nations. This reflects our common purpose. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:



- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
- To respond to human need by loving service.
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

I always try to end by saying that while there may be differences in how we worship, and that there remain some important theological and denominational differences among us, as Christians there is much more that unites than divides us. If we focus on the key elements, however we express them, they will help foster unity and a sense of shared identity among us.

I would love to know whether you agree with me or not. What would you say in answer to the question? Do you have a better response? Please do share your views.

Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you.” When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit....” (John 20:21-22)



Key links

Churches Together in England
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Conference of European Churches
World Council of Churches
Society of Ecumenical Studies
Unity News Across East of England
Hope Together

<https://cte.org.uk/>
<https://ctbi.org.uk/>
<https://ceceurope.org/>
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/>
<https://ecumenicalstudies.org/a-tent-of-learning/>
[Link to East of England News](#)
<https://www.hopetogether.org.uk>

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